

OUTGOING MESSAGE

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TO: IMMEDIATE SAIGON

1. FOLLOWING IS TEXT OF INTERAGENCY MEMORANDUM (CIA, DIA, AND INR) WHICH WAS DONE IN RESPONSE TO A NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL REQUEST.

2. FOR SAIGON: PLEASE PASS TO MESSRS. CARVER, SHACKLEY, AND

3. BEGIN TEXT.

SUBJECT: THE SECURITY SITUATION IN THE PHNOM PENH AREA

1. THERE DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE AN IMMEDIATE DANGER OF A GENERAL CAMBODIAN GOVERNMENT (GKR) MILITARY COLLAPSE IN THE PHNOM PENH AREA. THE KHMER COMMUNISTS (KC) PROBABLY WILL CONTINUE THEIR STRATEGY OF STEADY BUT WIDESPREAD GROUND ATTACKS AND SHELLINGS WHILE WAITING UNTIL SUPPLY SHORTAGES AND WAR-WEARINESS BREAK THE GOVERNMENT'S ABILITY OR WILL TO RESIST. WE BELIEVE THAT GOVERNMENT FORCES (FANK) WILL, FOR THE MOST PART, BE ABLE TO CONTAIN THE COMMUNISTS ALONG THE CAPITAL'S OUTER DEFENSES FOR THE NEXT WEEK OR SO. NONETHELESS, THE COMMUNISTS WILL CONTINUE ROCKET AND ARTILLERY ATTACKS AGAINST THE

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CITY IN GENERAL, AND POCHENTONG AIRFIELD, THE US MISSION, AND AMERICAN RESIDENCES IN PARTICULAR.4

2. AT MID-WEEK COMMUNIST FORCES RECAPTURED TUOL LEAP AND AGAIN MOVED WITHIN ARTILLERY RANGE OF POCHENTONG AIRPORT. HOWITZER FIRE ON MARCH 28 KNOCKED OUT THE PRIMARY MILITARY TAXIWAY, FORCING A SUSPENSION OF THE US AIRLIFT. THE TAXIWAY IS REPAIRABLE, BUT THE RECENT PATTERN OF ARTILLERY AND ROCKET ATTACKS INDICATES THAT THE COMMUNISTS CAN NOW PLACE ACCURATE FIRE ON VITAL FACILITIES.4

3. THERE IS LITTLE HOPE THAT FANK WILL PUSH KC ARTILLERY OUT OF RANGE OF THE AIRFIELD ON ANYTHING OTHER THAN AN INTERMITTENT BASIS. THUS, FUTURE COMMUNIST SHELLINGS WILL LIMIT THE USE OF POCHENTONG. THIS DOES NOT NECESSARILY MEAN, HOWEVER, THAT POCHENTONG CANNOT BE USED FOR EVACUATION OF PERSONNEL; UNLIKE LARGE JET AIRCRAFT, C-130S SHOULD BE ABLE TO USE THE AIRSTRIP. THE POSSIBILITY OF A DIRECT HIT ON AN AIRCRAFT ALWAYS EXISTS, BUT C-130S COULD LOAD AT DISPERSED AND ALTERNATING AREAS TO MINIMIZE THE RISK. THERE IS A CLEAR DANGER, HOWEVER, THAT AT ANY TIME COMMUNIST SHELLINGS COULD MAKE THE AIRFIELD TOTALLY UNUSABLE BY TRANSPORT AIRCRAFT.4

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4. ON THE OTHER HAND, WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THE COMMUNISTS WILL BE ABLE TO SEIZE THE AIRPORT IN THE NEXT WEEK OR SO. COMMUNIST GROUND FORCES ARE KEEPING STEADY PRESSURE ON GOVERNMENT DEFENSES WEST AND NORTH OF PHNOM PENH, BUT GOVERNMENT UNITS HAVE BEEN ABLE TO PREVENT ANY MAJOR COMMUNIST GAINS BY MOVING UNITS FROM FRONT TO FRONT. WHILE THIS PROCESS AND FANK'S STEADY BATTLEFIELD LOSSES HAVE WEAKENED THE CAPITAL'S OUTER DEFENSES, THE COMMUNISTS HAVE NOT EXPLOITED THEIR ADVANTAGE. INDEED, THERE IS SOME EVIDENCE THAT THE KC THEMSELVES ARE STRETCHED THIN AND MAY BE UNABLE TO PLACE MUCH GREATER PRESSURE ON PHNOM PENH AT THIS TIME.

5. POLITICAL STRAINS IN PHNOM PENH ARE ALSO CLEARLY GREATER NOW THAN AT ANY TIME IN THE WAR. BUT MOST RECENT MANEUVERING APPEARS DIRECTED TOWARD THE DEPARTURE OF LON NOL IN THE HOPE THAT THIS WILL SOMEHOW LEAD TO AN EARLY END TO THE FIGHTING. LON NOL APPARENTLY INTENDS TO GO ABROAD SOON, AND HIS DEPARTURE SHOULD TEMPORARILY REDUCE THE POTENTIAL FOR POLITICAL DISINTEGRATION. SHOULD HE DELAY MUCH LONGER, HOWEVER, OTHER GKR LEADERS WILL PROBABLY TRY TO FORCE HIM OUT. THE RESULT WOULD BE A POLITICAL CRISIS

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WHICH MIGHT MAKE IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO CONTINUE TO RESIST. THE POTENTIAL FOR SERIOUS UNREST REMAINS HIGH. FOR EXAMPLE, A HALT OF THE AIRLIFT OF RICE LASTING MORE THAN A FEW DAYS WOULD BRING RICE STOCKS DOWN TO THE LEVEL WHICH PRECIPITATED WIDESPREAD RIOTING AND LOOTING IN 1972. FINALLY, A NEGATIVE VOTE ON THE SUPPLEMENTAL AID TO CAMBODIA WOULD LEAD TO A QUICK UNRAVELLING OF THE GKR.

6. THE EFFECT OF A US EVACUATION ON GKR COHESION AND FANK'S WILL TO FIGHT WOULD DEPEND ON A NUMBER OF FACTORS:

- A SUDDEN LARGE-SCALE AND HIGHLY VISIBLE EVACUATION OF US PERSONNEL, THIRD-COUNTRY NATIONALS, AND LOCAL US MISSION EMPLOYEES WOULD BE SEEN AS A SIGNAL OF APPROACHING DEFEAT.
- THE EVACUATION OF SMALLER NUMBERS OVER A LONGER PERIOD OF TIME WOULD AT LEAST DELAY WIDESPREAD PANIC.
- AN ATTEMPT TO EVACUATE US PERSONNEL AFTER A NEGATIVE VOTE ON SUPPLEMENTAL ASSISTANCE WOULD QUICKLY BREAK FANK AND GKR MORALE, AND THIS WOULD MAKE AN ORDERLY

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EVACUATION EXCEEDINGLY DIFFICULT, IF NOT IMPOSSIBLE.

THE EVACUATION OF SENIOR GKR OFFICIALS WOULD SIGNAL THE END OF THE WAR, AND ORGANIZED FANK RESISTANCE WOULD QUICKLY END.

7. THE ABILITY AND WILLINGNESS OF FANK TO PROVIDE SECURITY FOR EVACUATION OPERATIONS IS SUSPECT. IN ANY CASE, THERE IS NO ASSURANCE THAT ANY OF FANK'S BEST TROOPS WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR SUCH DUTY. LARGE NUMBERS OF EVACUEES AT POCHENTONG AIRPORT OR AT A PHNOM PENH LOCATION -- ESPECIALLY IF MEMBERS OF THE GKR ELITE WERE INCLUDED -- COULD EASILY LEAD TO A BREAKDOWN IN THE DISCIPLINE OF FANK SECURITY FORCES AND TO MOB HYSTERIA. EVACUEES MIGHT ALSO BECOME THE TARGETS OF COMMUNIST SHELLINGS AND TERRORIST ATTACKS, AND THIS WOULD ONLY INCREASE THE RISK OF PANIC. E2 IMPDET.

DATE: 29 MARCH 1975
ORIG: BOB LAYTON
UNIT: ACTING/NIO/SSEA

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